

Introduction in Refuting the Paradigms of Kalaam and Ash'arism

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Introduction: The Sources and Principles of Aqeedah for Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah

The methodology of Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah:

1. The Aqeedah of Islaam is derived from the Qur'an, the Sunnah of Muhammad Ibn Abdullah (peace be upon him), and the Consensus of the Pious Predecessors, who understood the religion best.
2. All authentic narrations from the Prophet (peace be upon him) are accepted in the understanding of Islaam's Aqeedah.
3. That which we refer back in order to understand the Book and the Sunnah are those texts which explain others; and the understanding of the Salafus-Saalih and those scholars who followed their minhaj methodology.
4. All the principles and fundamentals of the Aqeedah were explained by the Prophet. That which which was not considered part of the religion at that time can not be considered part of the religion later.
5. We do not oppose anything from the Book, nor from the authentic Sunnah with qiyaas (analogy), personal views, kashf (intuition), nor the saying of any Shaykh or Imaam, etc.
6. The scripture and sound intellect are always in agreement; if there is an apparent contradiction, the revelation is given precedence.

From Dr. Naasir Al-Aql's 'The Principles of Ahl us-Sunnah in Deriving Aqidah'

Brief Discussion regarding Ahl as-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah and the Ash'ari School

There are a number of contentions between Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah and the Ash'ari school, including the Names and Attributes of Allah, the matters of predestination and occasionalism, the science of Kalaam and its repercussion on theology, and various other creedal disputes ranging from the nature of the Qur'an to the states of Faith.

The issue of Allah's Names and Attributes, as well as some general misconceptions, will be discussed briefly in this section, while predestination and dialectic theology will come at the end of the essay.

Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari and the Ash'ari School

Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari was born two hundred and sixty years after the Hijra, in an era of tumultuous theological discourse. He affiliated himself with the Mu'tazilite theological school and became a favoured disciple of Abu Ali Al-Jubbai, the lead Mu'tazilite theologian of Al-Basra. [1] The Mu'tazilah, who were dependent on rationalist and speculative approaches to theology, claimed the created nature of the Qur'an, a doctrine of enhanced free-will, the nonexistence of divine attribute, and various other unorthodox views.

The acquaintance of Al-Ash'ari with the Mu'tazilah led him to become the prospective successor of Al-Jubbai and one of the most talented theologians of Al-Basra. [2] However, a rapid transition saw Al-Ash'ari abandon the Mu'tazilite school and shift closer to traditionalist doctrine. This transition was not a comprehensive one, for he retained the Mu'tazilite cosmology and the methodology of Kalaam (dialectic approach to Islamic theology); he suggested that it would be possible to expose the Mu'tazilah at 'their own game' and 'chart a middle course' between the rationalism of the Mu'tazilah and the traditionalism of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. [3]

Later in Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari's life, in writing *Al-Ibaanah 'An Usul Ad-Diyaanah* and *Maqalaat Al-Islaamiyyin*, he entered the third phase of his ideological persuasion and repudiated his previous semi-traditionalist stances. The scholars who acknowledged the authenticity of these final works include Ibn 'Asakir [4] (who was an Ash'ari in creed), Al-Bayhaqi [5], Adh-Dhahabi [6] and many others. And while some have doubted the authorship of *Al-Ibaanah* to Al-Ash'ari, on the basis of merely what is written and not the authenticity of the text, a consensus of Muslim historians and scholars establish it as his. [7]

As for those who claim *Al-Ibaanah* as one of his earlier works, written to 'induce' Hanbali theologians after Al-Ash'ari left the Mu'tazilah and before he articulated the methodology of the contemporary Ash'aris [8], then it is rejected from them. There is no real basis for this claim beyond a speculation which taints Abu Hasan's reputation and shows him to be a man of great doctrinal instability unbecoming of a founding ideologue. On the other hand, we say he is an Imaam who was upon misguidance in creed and eventually came closer to Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah.

Scholars associated with the Ash'ari School

A scholar who played a pivotal role in systemising and espousing the Ash'ari semi-traditionalist doctrine was Abu Bakr Al-Baqillani, who died some seventy years after Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari. [9] The role of Al-Baqillani is quite delicate, for he is the first Ash'ari theologian to arise after the death of the founder; and it is also within Al-Baqillani's tenure, in the first fifty years after Al-Ash'ari's death, that major doctrinal alterations are said to have taken place in the theological school.

Montgomery Watt, cited in the *Encyclopedia of Islaam*, suggests that 'Little is known about the views of the Ash'ariyya in the half-century after the founder's death. Al-Baqillani is the first person whose work is extant and accessible, and by his time it is noteworthy that the Ash'ariyya are making use of certain conceptions of the Mu'tazila. [...] One point on which the school was beginning to differ from al-Ash'ari himself was in the interpretation of the corporeal terms applied to God, such as hands, face and sitting on the throne. Al-Ash'ari had said these were to be taken neither literally nor metaphorically but *bi-la kayf*, 'without asking how'; but al-Baghdadi and al-Dhuwayni interpreted 'hand' metaphorically as 'power', and 'face' as 'essence' or 'existence'; and the attitude of most of the later Ash'ariyya was similar' [10]

The other prominent theologians and dialecticians of the school include Fakhr Ad-Deen Ar-Raazi, Abu Al-Ma'aali Al-Juwayni and Abu Haamid Al-Ghazali. As for the jurists associated with Ash'arism, they include Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, one of the greatest jurists and Hadith experts of Islamic scholarship; Imaam An-Nawawi, also a great jurist in his own right and a heavy influence on the Shafi'i madhhab; Imaam Al-Qurtubi, the Mufassir and Maaliki jurist; and a number of other well-renowned scholars..

However, as will be demonstrated later in this essay, many of the jurists may have shared certain understandings with the Ash'ari school but were not necessarily prototypical Ash'ari scholars.

Differences between Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah and the Ash'ari School regarding Names and Attributes

Simple Explanation of the Difference:

Creed of Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah: When a sacred text speaks of Allaah's Attributes (Yad, Wajh, etc), the text is affirmed; it is then understood upon the apparent meaning without correlating resemblance between Allah and creation or delving into the modality (form, state and quality) of the attribute.

Ash'ari Creed: When a sacred text speaks of Allaah's Attributes (Yad, Wajh, etc), the text is affirmed; it is then evaluated as to whether the apparent meaning establishes any resemblance to His creation or not; if it does, it is relegated in meaning (not discussed or affirmed) or interpreted allegorically (Allah's Yad as His 'power', etc).

The Pretext:

A pretext which encourages the Ash'aris and some schools of the Mutakallimen to resort to either Tafweed Al-Ma'naa (relegating the meaning) or Ta'weel (allegorical interpretation) is their unfounded assumption that the descriptions of the Qur'an and Sunnah such as 'Wajh' and 'Yad' entail correlation with the created form. So in their attempt to dispel this anthropomorphic notion – in accordance with the statements of Allaah (swt) 'There is nothing like unto Him' and 'And there is none His equal' – they negate the characteristics of Allaah on the premise that His creation also possess them.

However, this formulation is simplistic and baseless. That the word 'Yad', which Allaah has attributed to Himself, be correlated with the hands of creation is indicative of a methodologically inherent anthropomorphism by which the Yad is not understood except through the scope of created limb.

The verse 'there is nothing like unto Him' negates 'likeness' and 'resemblance' in modality (kayfiyyah), which does not restrict the possibility of there being some similarities between created and creator in attribute. So just as the Lord of the Worlds speaks with truth, so may the human being speak with truth – but to compare our truth with the Divine Truth is the grave blasphemy and error. And just as the Lord of the Worlds possesses a Yad, so may the human being possess a yad (hand) – but to compare our hands to the Divine Hands is the grave blasphemy and error.

However, the scholars associated with Ash'arism maintain that "the hooligans and fools among the deviant crpto-anthropomorphists [...] have believed about Allaah and His attributes things that He is high beyond and sanctified from having—such as “the form,” the “hand,” the “mouth,” “the foot,” “the descent...” [11]

In response to this troubled claim, the statements of the earliest and most prominent scholars of the Ummah are sufficient. Imaam At-Tirmidhi, the pious predecessor, Imaam and direct student of Imaam Al-Bukhari, Imaam Muslim ibn Al-Hajjaj and Imaam Abu Dawud, says:

[Point One: Negation of Resemblance and Affirmation of Descent]: "It has been said by more than one person from the People of Knowledge about such ahaadeeth [of attributes] there is no resemblance to the Attributes of Allaah. And the Lord - the Blessed, the Most High - descends to the lowest heaven every night.

[Point Two: Affirmation of the Narrations without Delving into Kayfiyyah (How)]: "So [the people of knowledge] say: Affirm these narrations, have faith in them and do not deny them, and do not ask how.

[Point Three: The Consensus of the Pious Predecessors]: "The likes of this has been related from Maalik ibn Anas, Sufyaan ath-Thawree, ibn 'Uyaynah and 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubaarak, who all said about these ahaadeeth: 'Leave them as they are without asking how.' Such is the saying of the People of Knowledge from Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah.

[Point Four: Censure of the Allegorical Negators]: "However, the Jahmiyyah oppose these narrations and say: This is making resemblance! However, Allaah - the Most High - has mentioned in various places in His Book the Attribute of Hand, Hearing and Seeing. So the Jahmiyyah make false allegorical interpolation (ta'weel) of these verses and explain them in a way other than that explained by the People of Knowledge. They say: Indeed, Allaah did not create Aadam with His own Hand. And they say that the meaning of Hand is: Power.

[Point Five: Explanation of What Resemblance Is]: "Ishaaq ibn Raahawaiah (one of the famous teachers of al-Bukhari) said: 'Resemblance is if it is said: Hand like my hand, or similar to my hand. Or Hearing like my hearing, or similar to my hearing. So when it is said: Hearing like my hearing, or similar to my hearing, then this is making resemblance. "But if what is being said is what Allaah has said: Hand, Hearing, Seeing, and it is not asked how, nor is it said: like my hearing, or similar to my hearing, then this is not making resemblance" – [Sunan At-Tirmidhi (1/128-129)]

Imaam At-Tirmidhi, whose credibility and status is undoubted and eludes any Ash'ari scholar of the past, present or future, reports coherently upon the people of knowledge and the pious predecessors. He clarifies that resemblance is not in affirming the Hand, Face or Descent of Allaah in their apparent meaning, but in stating that 'Allaah's attribute is like my attribute'.

Ibn Qudamah said about the pious predecessors: "What has come concerning the Attributes in the Book of Allaah, the Exalted, or what has been narrated by authentic chains of transmission, then the Madhhab of the pious predecessors, may Allaah have mercy upon them, is to affirm them and the take them upon their apparent meanings" [12]

Did the Pious Predecessors Relegate the Meaning of the Attributes in the Texts?

Many suggest that the early generations would only affirm the texts of Allah's attribute but not the apparent meaning, instead assigning it to Allah. This is a baseless proposition, born of inauthentic and decontextualized statements, which opposes the consensus of the pious predecessors who methodologically affirmed the apparent meaning and then assigned the modality (kayfiyyah) of the attributes to Allah and did not delve into it.

Had the companions understood Tafweed Al-Ma'nah (relegation of meaning) as the spirit of Allah's Names and Attributes in the Qur'an, they surely would have sought elaboration from the Prophet. It is unfathomable that the companions would allow the verses of Allah's attributes, which are essential to Tawheed, to be rendered mute. The reality is that the companions and pious predecessors all took Allah's names and attributes upon the Thaahir (apparent meaning) of the Arabic language, which did not escape them or necessitate questioning. The Thaahir of any statement is defined as the meaning, subject to the context, which first comes to the mind when heard or read.

So in accordance with the statements of the pious predecessors, the Aqeedah of Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah is to affirm and understand the apparent meaning of the attribute. For example, with Allah's statement 'The Most Merciful ascended unto the Throne', the pious predecessors affirmed the apparent meaning of the Throne and Ascension but stopped at the modality (kayf) of these meanings:

Imaam Maalik said: "The Kayf (modality) is not known (al-kayf ghayr ma'lum), and al-Istiwa' (the ascension) is not unknown" [13]

Al-Qaadi Abu Ya'la said: "I asked al-Awza'i, Malik, Sufyan [al-Thawri] and al-Layth [b. Sa'd] on these narrations in which there is an Attribute [in it]. They said: Pass them on without how (bilâ kayf)." [14]

Ibn 'Abd Al-Barr reports a consensus when he says: "Ahlus Sunnah have unanimously agreed in affirming those Attributes (of Allah) that are found in the Quran or Sunnah, and believing in them as haqiqi(real), not as majazi (metaphorical), except that they do not explain the 'howness' (kayfiyyah) of these Attributes" [15]

Upon this basis, a scholar who affirms the apparent meaning, in any of Allah's Names and Attributes, employs Tafweed in the 'howness' and not in the meaning of the text. Furthermore, any scholar who emphasised the relegation of the modality has automatically affirmed the apparent meaning; otherwise, which modality is being relegated if the meaning itself has not been affirmed?

Brief Discussion of Popular Allegations

This is typically countered with the citation of a weak text of Ibn Abbas, regarding Allah's Kursi meaning knowledge, which is Munkar [16]; Maalik Ibn Anas making allegorical interpretation, which is weak both on the authority of Habib Ibn Abi Habib and Mutarrif ibn Abdullah [17]; the statement of Al-Bukhari that Allah's laughter means His mercy, which depends on an incomplete chain of transmission between Al-Khattabi and Al-Farabi, as confirmed by Ibn Hajar [18]; and isolated citations to Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, on the authority of his uncle, that no-one else of his sons or students came with.

Rather, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal did not only affirm the apparent meanings of the text, but was most stringent in doing such. For example, he affirmed Allah's ascension unto the Throne when he said: "We believe that Allaah is above His Throne however He wishes and as He wishes, without a limit, nor an Attribute that the describer can comprehend, nor a limit which the describer can place. So the Attributes of Allaah are from Him and for Him, and He is as He described Himself" [19]

As for the statement of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal "We believe in [the Attributes] and consider them true, without how and without meaning", this is a cliché of the neo-Jahmites. The intended definition of 'meaning' in the statement of Ibn Hanbal is the allegorical meanings of the Mu'tazilah, which went against the apparent. The greatest evidence for this is that Ahmad Ibn Hanbal did not leave an attribute of Allah except that he took it on its apparent meaning, as demonstrated by his statement regarding the Throne; so it is fathomable that he would make an absolute statement and then act in complete opposition to it throughout his life?

As for those who claim that Ahmad Ibn Hanbal practiced allegorical interpretation and that "Imaam al-Bayhaquee related from Haakim, from Aboo 'Amr ibn Sammaak, from Hanbal, the son of the brother of Ahmad ibn Hanbal's father that, quote: 'Ahmad ibn Hanbal figuratively interpreted the word of Allaah, Most High: as meaning: His recompense shall come', then the chain of transmission of the narration, which al-Bayhaquee mentions from Haakim from Abu 'Amr ibn as-Sammaak, is weak. Adh-Dhahabee said in his Talkhees of al-Mustadrak (1/539) that Abu 'Amr ibn as-Sammaak is not even known.

Others have claimed that the statements of Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna (d. 98/717), who said, "The interpretation of everything with which Allah has described Himself in His book is to recite it and remain silent about it" and Ash-Shafi'i, who said "I believe in what has come from Allah as it was intended by Allah, and I believe in what has come from the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) as it was intended by the Messenger of Allah" constitute evidence of their Tafweed of the meaning [20].

This is evidence of undoubted poverty, for neither of the two statements retain any reference to denying the apparent meaning, but are general principles in not subjugating the intended meaning of Allah's words to human argumentation. So, if anything, these evidences are used against the Ash'aris themselves, for they and the Mutakallimeen defied the apparent and natural meanings of the Qur'an and subjected them to dialectic approach.

Where is Allaah?

Allaah (swt) says: "Are you assured that the One [Allaah] who is in the Heavens will not cause the earth to tremble under you, so behold it shakes."

Mu'awiyah Ibn Al-Hakam reports: The Prophet requested that [a slave girl] be brought, and then asked her, "Where is Allaah?" and she said, "In the sky (Fi al-sama)"; whereupon he asked her, "Who am I?" and she said, "You are the Messenger of Allaah"; at which he said, "Free her, for she is a believer" [Sahih Muslim, the Muwatt'a of Maalik and Adh-Dhahabi has declared it Mutawaatir in Mukhtasar Al-'Uluw]

Whilst the texts establish a wording that Allaah is 'in the sky', the actuality of 'in' is subject to the language of Arabic which postulates that 'Ala (above) can be replaced with Fi. Numerous examples are found in the Qur'an, such as: 'I will surely crucify you in (fi) the trunks of date-palms' (20:71) [meaning 'on ('ala) the trunks']. Therefore, Allaah is above the heavens as is affirmed by the texts of the Sunnah, the statements of the companions and the fitrah. Imaam Al-Dhahabi said: "This is an authentic hadith. And likewise we observe that whoever is asked where is Allaah, says readily due to their nature (fitrah), 'Above the sky'" [21] Another valid interpretation is that the word 'Samaa' is itself synonymous with 'height' and 'elevation' and not necessarily 'sky', such that it is understood as Allah is in the heights.

However, many amongst the Ash'aris insist on either practicing Tafweed Al-Ma'na (relegation of the meaning), positing that Allaah exists without a place [22] or hanging the text upon a metaphorical basis, such as to claim that "[Allaah] is not described by saying that His entity is literally above the heaven. Rather, He is above everything in His tremendous power and His magnificent wisdom."

These understandings are baseless and thoroughly negated by the clear statements of the prominent companions and predecessors who affirmed that Allaah is indeed above the seven heavens:

The Mother of the Believers, Zaynab Bint Jahsh, upon the authority of Anas: "That she would be joyfully proud amongst the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and say: 'your families married you off and Allaah married me off from above seven skies' [Sahih Al-Bukhari]

Ibn 'Abbas, when it was narrated that he entered upon A'ishah and she was dying, said to her: 'you were the most beloved of women to the Prophet and he did not love except what is good; and your innocence descended from above seven skies' - [Ad-Darimi and its chain is good]

Sulaymaan at-Taimee, the pious predecessor, says: "If I were asked, where is Allaah? I would say, above the heaven. And if it said, where was the Throne before the Heaven? I would say, over the water. And if it is said, where was the Throne before the water? I would say, I do not know." [23]

Even Imaam Al-Qurtubi, who himself agreed with the Ash'aris in some issues, narrates the path of the pious predecessors in the Tafsir of Surah Al-A'raaf: "The pious predecessors would not negate direction nor would they utter such. Rather, they and the rest uttered in affirmation of that (i.e. direction) for Allaah Ta'ala, as did utter His Book, and His Messengers informed – to his words: None from the Salaf al-Salih denied that Allaah Ta'ala Rose over His Throne literally (haqiqatan)'.

The Inaccurate Claim of Ash'ari Dominance

The Scholars Associated with Ash'arism Distanced themselves from Misguidance

Many scholars who were associated with Ash'arism either recanted from the doctrine or dissociated from central understandings of the school. So whilst a theologian such as Abu Al-Ma'aali Al-Juwayni suggests that observation and rationalisation are obligatory for individual acquaintance with Allah [24], the jurists and scholars dissociated from this understanding and condemned it:

Imaam An-Nawawi said: "The majority amongst the Salaf and the Khalaf [say] that when a person believes in the religion of Islaam with a firm and resolute belief devoid of any doubt, that this is sufficient for him, and he is a believer amongst the Muhawahhideen. [And] it is not obligatory upon him to learn the evidences of the Theologians and knowing Allaah, the Exalted, through them. [This being] in opposition to the one who made it obligatory and made it a condition of a person being from the people of the qiblah [and who] claimed that he does not have the ruling [applicable to] the Muslims except through this. And this madhhab is the saying of many of the Mu'tazilah and some of our associates, the Theologians (Mutakallimoon), and it is a manifest error..." [25]

Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani, after citing Al-Juwayni's opinion, said: "The saying of Allaah, the Most High, So set your face towards the upright religion, Allaah's fitrah to which He has made mankind to be inclined... and the hadeeth, "Each child is born upon the fitrah (i.e. inclination to Allah's recognition and Tawheed)..." are very clear in rebutting this matter from its very foundation." [26]

Imaam Al-Qurtubi goes even further by censuring the methodology of Kalaam altogether, when he said: "And sufficient in deterring from delving into the path of the Mutakallimeen (the philosophical theologians) is what has been established from the preceding Imaams, such as Umar bin Abdul-Azeez, Maalik bin Anas and ash-Shaafi'ee. And the leading scholars have categorically stated that the Companions never delved into al-jawhar and al-'arad [substance and accident, (taken from the Greek Philosophers by the Mu'tazilah and then the Ash'ariyyah)] and whatever is related to that in the investigative studies of the Mutakallimeen (Theologians). And anyone who desires a path besides theirs, then suffice it as misguidance for him..." [27]

And he continued: "And al-kalaam led to many of its people to doubt, and some of them to deviation and some of them to be neglectful in the tasks of worship. The reason for that was their turning away from the texts of the legislator and their seeking the realities of affairs from other than them. There is not in the strength of the intellect, what allows it to grasp what is in the texts of the legislator of the ruling that He has kept in the knowledge with Himself. And many of their leading scholars turned back from their path, until it has come from Imaam ul-Haramayn (al-Juwaynee) that he said, "I have traversed the greatest ocean and in seeking the truth I plunged myself into everything that the people of knowledge forbade. And now, I have returned and believed the madhhab of the Salaf..."

Similar examples of recantation and rejection are too many to number: As-Suyuti rejected the allegorical description of ascension [28]; At-Tabari affirmed the ascension and the Hands of Allah [29]; Abu Muhammad Al-Juwayni renounced the Creed of the Ash'aris altogether [30]; and so did Ibn Nasir and Fakhr Ad-Deen Ar-Raazi according to Ibn Kathir. [31] This is in addition to the highly strenuous and perplexing disorientation of many theologians, such as Abu Haamid Al-Ghazali, who were too unique to articulate consistent and coherent methodologies in accordance with the Ash'ari theology.

So at the very least, it may be deduced that the inclination of the scholars who are associated with Ash'arism is not in complete unison with the rigid methodologies and fundamental stipulations of the theology. Thus, it would be unfair to consider them 'Ashari Theologians', but scholars who agreed with the Ash'aris in some issues. This phenomenon is altogether absent in the ranks of the Athari and Orthodox Sunni school of theology, as evident in the scarcity of reports pertaining to recantation.

The Inaccurate Claim of Ash'ari Dominance

As is the prosaic response amongst Ash'ari apologetics, the defence of their Aqeedah is in claiming the majority of the scholars of Islaam were upon their creed. Cited names include Al-Baqqillaani (d.402 H), al-Baghdadi (d. 429 AH), Abu Al-Ma'ali Al-Juwainy (d. 478 AH), Al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH), Fakhr Ad-Deen Ar-Razi (d. 543 AH), Ibn Al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH), An-Nawawi (d. 676 AH), Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalaani (d. 852 H), Al-Qurtubi (d. 671 H), As-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) and Al-Haythami (d. 974 H).

At this junction it is essential to reiterate that many of those associated with the Ash'ari theology either recanted from it or disagreed with it in fundamental issues; whereby they agreed with the Ash'aris in some matters but were not themselves Ash'aris. For this reason, it is inaccurate to consider figures such as Ibn Hajar, At-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi or even Abu Hasan Al-Ash'ari as associates of the contemporary school, for they negated a number of its fundamentals or recanted from the doctrine as a whole.

Furthermore, it is essential to understand the historical interplay of theology and politics in Islamic history, which has demonstrated that the realm of scholarship is directly influenced by the inclinations of the ruling class. There is little doubt that the Ash'ari doctrine gained leverage through favour with the authorities, such that Al-Ghazali won favour with the vizier Nizam Al-Mulk who then enforced the Ash'ari Aqeedah over his province. This is in addition to the overwhelming support of the Ottoman and Ayyubid states, which supported the creed both directly and indirectly.

However, even such unfavourable realities did not undermine the creed of Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah, which is the traditional and natural creed of the Muslims. This Aqeedah retained the overwhelming majority of esteemed theologians, scholars of Hadith and jurists, including Imaam At-Thawri (d. 161 AH), Imaam Maalik (d. 179 AH), Abdullah Ibn Al-Mubaarak (d. 181 AH); Imaam Ash-Shafi'i (d. 203 AH), Imaam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH), Imaam Al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH), Imaam Muslim (d. 261 AH), Imaam Abu Dawud (d. 275 AH), Imaam At-Tirmidhi (d. 279 AH), Ibn Khuzaymah (d. 311 AH), Ad-Daraqutni (d. 385 AH), Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH), Al-Baghawi (d. 510 AH), Abdul-Qaadir Jaylaani (d. 561 AH), Ibn Qudamah (d. 610 AH), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH), Imaam Adh-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH), Ibn Al-Qayyim (d. 758 AH), Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH), Ibn Rajab (d. 795 AH) and countless others before and after them.

Therefore, the Ash'ari theology is a minority in the realm of prominent scholarship, even if it is a majority in institutionalised courts and learning centres. Even Ibn 'Asaakir, himself an Ash'ari from the latter generations, affirms that until his time the Ash'aris were indeed a minority and that he was arguing upon the case of a 'correct and oppressed minority' [32].

Kalaam: What Influenced the Theologies

The approaches of the Mutakallimeen were largely of Hellenistic origin, initially espoused in rudimentary form by the Mu'tazilah. Though Ibn Khaldun, for example, does suggest that Kalaam was present amongst some Muslims prior to the advent of the Mu'tazilah [33], this presence was minimal and confined to the topics of predestination (between the extremes of the Qadariyyah and Jabariyyah) and the status of the sinner (between the extremes of the Murji'ah and the Khawarij).

Yet, with the advent of ideas and intellectual progression, Kalaam took on a more potent and diverse reality such that different Kalaam schools evolved and came to argue amongst themselves, with some closer to Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah than others. The spectrum of the Kalaam schools (from closest to Ahl As-Sunnah to the most distant) comprises of the Ash'aris, Maturidis, Mu'tazilah and Jahmiyyah. However, the underlying elements of these schools is essentially similar, rendering them suspect to the forces of influence both from within the science and external to it.

Christian and Jewish Influence

Christian influence upon the Mutakallimeen may have had significant influence on the doctrines of predestination; Guillaume, in his Remarks on Free Will and Predestination in Islaam, suggests that "Christian influence is to be found in the later Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites" in the matters of predestination and freewill and that "most modern scholars are of the opinion that the belief in free will arose under the influence of Christianity in opposition to the native Muslim belief". [34]

Becker, in his Christliche Polemik, says that "the whole method of Kalaam springs from Christianity. Whoever reads Islamic dogmatic writers and Christian patristics in turn is so convinced of the connection that he has no further need of detailed proof". [35]

The reality of these claims is difficult to establish considering the lack of primary sources. However, it is established by Imaam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal that Jahm Ibn Safwan (d. 128 AH), of the Jahmiyyah, did indeed share arguments with the Christians. [36]

As for the Jews, As-Subki states that ta'teel (denial of the attributes of Allaah) began amongst the Muslims through the influence of the Jewish Labeed Ibn Al-A'sam [37]. Ibn Al-Atheer also claims that Labeed Ibn Al-A'sam also introduced the theory of the created Qur'an into Islaam. [38]

Indian Influence

Jahm Ibn Safwan, the founder of what came to be known as the Jahmites, was heavily influenced by an Indian group known as the Sammuniyyah. It is mentioned by Al-Imaam Muhammad Ibn Isma'eel Al-Bukhari, in Khalq Af'aal Al-Ibaad, that Al-Jahm Ibn Safwan abandoned the prayer during his debates with the Sammuniyyah and came to adopt notions associated with them. [39]

Imaam Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, says: "[Jahm] was a person of much disputation and theological rhetoric (kalaam), and most of his theological rhetoric was regarding Allaah... So he met a people amongst the disbelievers called the Sammuniyyah. So they came to know Jahm and they said to him: "We will argue with you and if our proof overcomes you, you will enter our religion, and if your proof overcomes us, we will enter your religion [...] so Jahm became bewildered..." [40]

Ancient Greek Atomism in Kalaam

In order to enhance theistic argument, the Mutakallimeen referred to Ancient Greek and Phoenician philosophers – including Mochus of Sidon, Leucippus and Democritus – who claimed that the universe was essentially composed of 'indivisible' atoms (jawaahir) that aggregated with one another to form bodies (ajsaam). According to the Mutakallimeen, any incidental attributes (a'raad), such as height and colour, or occurrences (hawaadith), such as motion and increased temperature, rendered the subject a created body of continually recreated attribute or occurrence.

Essentially, this theory may appear innocent dialectic and metaphysical theory, however its comprehensive application stipulates that God is Himself incapable of movement or body without entering the realm of creation. This grave notion, whose practitioners did not spare even the creator in its application, is akin to establishing that every existent needs a creator or every living needs an originator and then applying it upon Allah and negating His existence or life; obviously to apply the principles of the creation upon the creator is flawed and problematic.

But instead of revaluating their problematic principle, which restricts motion and attribute to God, which is in diametric contradiction to the understanding of the companions and pious predecessors, the schools of Kalaam persisted by adopting it as a comprehensive theological basis.

Essentially, the Aristotelian classification of observable reality into substance and accident and the atomism of Democritus united upon the creeds of the Mutakallimeen. The imminent misapplication eventuated and spread, in subjugating the text to reason, when these foreign constructs were established as universally sound methodologies by which the Qur'an and Authentic Sunnah could then be interpreted.

This paradigm and methodological sequence can be found in the theological works of the Ash'ari school. For example, there is a clear structure in Fakhr Ad-Deen Ar-Raazi's Ma'aalim Usul Ad-Deen, where discussion of speculation, knowledge, bodies and substances all precede and define the understanding of Allah and scripture:

Chapter One: Discussion on Knowledge and Speculation, Premises of Knowledge, etc;

Chapter Two: Discussion on Existence, Atoms, Substances, Space, Accidents etc.;

Chapter Three: The Emergence of Bodies, The Existence of the Creator, The Impossibilities of God with Body, Substance and Place, etc;

Chapter Four: The Knowledge of God, God's Creation and Ability, God's Speech, Rebuttal of the Hanbalis regarding God's Speech, God's speech is one Entity, etc

The Flaw of Hellenistic and Ash'arite Atomism

The centrality of atomism upon the theologies of Kalaam is unquestionable. Prominent Ash'ari theologians such as Al-Baqallini (in At-Tamheed), Abul-Qaahir Al-Baghdadi (in Usul Ad-Deen), Al-Juwayni (in Lum' Al-Adillah), Fakhr Ad-Deen Al-Razi (in Al-Arba'een and Ma'aalim Usul Ad-Din) and Al-Ghazali (in Al-Iqtisaad Fee Al'Itiqaad) all centralized the atomist approach as part of theological discourse. And in accordance with this, it influenced their creed in the matters of Names and Attributes and the Divine Decree.

This atom of the Mutakallimeen is not necessarily the 'atom' of quantum physics, but the so-called basic and indivisible unit of all substance and bodies. The atomists posited that there are indivisible units that unite, with others of its type, to form a body. This concept went unchallenged until modern science established that:

- a. Atoms differ from one another, in structure and substance, and hence cannot be the basic unit the ancient atomists spoke of.
- b. The once considered 'indivisible unit' is merely a conglomerate of far smaller units (protons, neutrons and electrons) also subject to their unique form.
- c. Not only are protons and neutrons separate and distinct units; they are further composed of quarks and leptons, which are distinct from one another.
- d. The quarks are then composed of even smaller, diverse sub-quark particles.

Thus, it can be established that the atom theory, as a field of scientific inquiry since the 1600's, is trending towards theorems of increasing complexity and diversity within the atom, thereby frustrating, if not nullifying, the premises of ancient atomism which had significant influence on the Mutakallimeen.

This predication of scientific notion in the matters of Aqeedah subjected immutable doctrines of Islaam to ever-evolving understandings of science. This is, undoubtedly, not the basis by which the revelation is derived or Aqeedah is understood.

Some Repercussions of Kalaam

Theological Flimsiness

To subjugate understanding of the revelation to mutable scientific notions equates to undermining the self-sufficient nature of Islaam and the perfection of its methodology, as articulated by its earliest generations. The perfect appreciation and implementation of the revelation on the part of the Messenger, his companions and the pious predecessors was not subject to multitudes of Hellenistic and Atomist theorems, nor was it the basis of their theistic argumentation.

As we have seen, modern science has overwhelmingly refuted the theorems of the ancient atomists and Ash'arites, thereby subjecting an entire theological realm to a crisis in its foundations. It is obvious to all those familiar with the history of science that it is inherently subject to constant revision and revaluation, whereby building upon a particular theorem an entire theological school is the peak of irresponsibility.

Had it not been for the firmness of Ahl Al-Hadeeth, Islamic theology might have been subjected to similar trials as the Christian Churches of contemporary times. The fermentation of aggressive atheism and nominal Christianity in Europe is some consequence of a historical Church, particularly during the Middle Ages and via St. Augustine, which posited theological doctrines upon various Hellenistic paradigms at the expense of intended scriptural definition.

Like the Mutakallimeen, St. Augustine contributed previously unfounded allegorical approaches to scripture; this facilitated the Bible's irrelevance, lack of expressivity and 'metaphorical' basis. And whilst the Qur'an is obviously a different case to the New Testament in authenticity, the arousal of 'metaphorical scripture' may have eventuated if the Mutakallimeen dominated Islamic discourse.

Predestination and Occasionalism

Due to the concepts derived from atomism, which stipulate God's continual recreation of creation at every spatio-temporal instant of existence, the Ash'aris effectively negate effective cause by the concept of 'kasb' (acquisition). This doctrine was first declared by Al-Ash'ari himself and elaborated by Al-Ghazzali in what came to be known as occasionalism (God is the actor and events are merely occasions on which God brings about what are normally thought of as their effects). Bernard Watt states that "the formula of Kasb was that God creates the acts of a man, and that the man "acquires them". [41]

Shaykh Yasir Qadhi says: 'The Ash'arite position on predestination is that God creates the actions of the servant directly without the servant himself causing that act, and that the servant then 'acquires' the reward or punishment of that deed. Hence, there is only an illusion of free-will, for in the end all actions are a direct result of God's will and action. This theory, propounded by al-Ash'ar? himself, is known as the theory of 'acquisition', or kasb.' [42]

Asst. Professor Sujkae Lee states that "Islamic occasionalism seems to have emerged when the theologians of the Ash'arite school of Kalaam (Islamic dialectic theology) began to consider the implications of the systematic reinterpretation, development, and integration of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism that occurred within the Islamic intellectual world" [43]

And since God is considered the only active force in universe, casual connection is continually vertical in nature between creation and creator with no continuity between practitioner and

practice or between means and end. This perspective is therefore closer to the understanding of the Jabariyyah who denied free will and stated that actions of people are nothing more than Allaah's actions. These notions led to many differences and dialectic contradiction amongst the Ash'arite school itself, such that it is difficult to ascertain which doctrine represents them.

Such understandings are opposed to Ahl As-Sunnah Wal-Jamaa'ah, who affirm that Allaah has manifested in His creation (including human beings) efficient causalities and natural abilities that stand through His permission. Upon this basis, Ahl As-Sunnah affirms God's predestination and eternal knowledge but considers man responsible and capable in his acts, via causes and effects; every human possess inherent faculties of choice and action by the will and permission of Allaah. These choices and acts are known by Him, in His eternal knowledge, before they are manifested.

Ibn Al-Qayyim says in Ash-Shifaa' that the correct Sunn? belief "acknowledges God's omnipotence and the predestination of man's acts, but at the same time considers man as a responsible actor. Man exercises his choice and will, and then carries out his actions". [44]

Indeed, man exercises his choice and will and then carries out his actions and adopts his beliefs.

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